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SUBJECT: THIS WEEK IN ALBANIA, NOVEMBER 3-10, 2007

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11. (U) The following is a weekly report prepared by Embassy Tirana's local staff to provide political and economic context and insight into developments in Albania. These updates will supplement post's DAR reports and reporting cables.

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

12. (U) Keep the Pedal to the Metal: Amid growing expectations for a 2008 invitation to NATO membership, USNATO Ambassador Victoria Nuland spearheaded a U.S. interagency delegation to assess Albania's progress. Following meetings with President Topi, Prime Minister Berisha and other senior officials, Ambassador Nuland in a press conference praised the country's contributions to regional stability but called for greater progress on judicial and electoral reform. "Our message today was that Albania has made a huge amount of progress but as we head towards the Bucharest summit, now is the time to keep the foot on the reform gas pedal and keep rolling," Nuland said. NATO integration remains the GOA's top priority, with overwhelming support from Albanian citizens. As the country's hopes to enter the EU remain distant, the GOA is making every effort to prepare a strong case ahead of the Bucharest Summit in April of next year.

13. (U) Deepening the Ties that Bind: Albanian leaders have forged deeper ties with Canada through two recent visits, marking a new chapter in bilateral relations. During PM Berisha's visit last week to attend the General Assembly of the Atlantic Treaty Association, Canadian PM Stephen Harper singled out Albania's strong contributions to NATO, particularly in Afghanistan, and emphasized that Canada puts Albania at the top of the list of NATO aspirants.

14. (U) This visit follows on the heels of Speaker Jozefina Topalli, who highlighted Albania's progress on NATO reforms and regional contribution toward solutions for Kosovo, part of the GOA's broader effort to convince NATO members to vote "yes" in Bucharest next year.

15. (U) The PG's Fate in Topi's Hands: President Bamir Topi received official word this week that Parliament recommends the dismissal of Prosecutor General (PG) Sollaku. Approval from the President would conclude a two-year effort by the government to remove Sollaku. Meanwhile, the Constitutional Court agreed to hear Sollaku's case to invalidate Parliament's recommendation on November

126. Action on these developments will be taken amid a growing consensus from all political sides that a solution must be found to end the current impasse between the office of the PG and the government.

"Whatever must happen ultimately should happen immediately." --

Henry A. Kissinger

¶6. (U) Corruption Arrests Continue: Ongoing discussions over the fate of the PG have not disrupted cooperation between law enforcement agencies to combat corruption. On November 8, authorities arrested the General Secretary of the Ministry of Labor, Spartak Gjini, and two colleagues on charges of corruption through tender procedures. The officials were arrested following a three month investigation by the new Joint Investigative Unit. It is the second high profile arrest of government officials in recent weeks.

¶7. (U) Miles to Go Before We Sleep: On November 6, the European Commission released its annual strategy on EU enlargement, including a summary of Albania's progress toward EU integration. The report highlights recent success in solidifying the market economy and aligning legislation with EU standards and policies. It calls for further progress to strengthen the rule of law, particularly constructive dialogue between the parties to implement electoral and judicial reforms, and improved operation of public administration. EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn said: "Albania has made some progress in recent months in the fight against corruption and operation of public administration, but it is clear that more remains to be done before we move to the next stage of membership into the EU."

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS

¶8. (U) Diversifying the Mobile Market: The GOA announced it will launch a fourth mobile phone license to increase competition in this fast-growing market. With a lack of fixed line capacity, mobile usage has increased from 15,0 sr n20 tto 1.9 million in 2007, u lbana utmr ay some of the highest rate nte region. Two operators, AMC (a subsidiary of the Cosmote Group) and Vodafone, currently share the lucrative market of \$450 million annual revenue. A third company, Eagle, will join them in early ¶2008.

ARTS AND CULTURE

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¶9. (U) Tirana Fashion Week: Tirana's first Fashion Week kicked off Thursday, October 25, showcasing designers from Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia and Greece in two weeks of events. Sixty Albanian models wore the latest European and Balkan fashions as well as clothes inspired by folk culture and national dress, accompanied by folk music. (See http://blog.nj.com/fashiontoday/2007/10/fashion_week_tirana.html for photos.) The event was organized by Joni Peci, a young Albanian recently returned from abroad to help build a better Albania.

PERSON OF THE WEEK

¶10. (U) Inva Mula: Albania's most renowned opera singer is perhaps best known to American audiences as the soprano voice behind the Diva in the film "The Fifth Element." She began her opera career at an early age, studying classical music at the Academy of Arts in Tirana. The fall of communism gave her an international audience, and she was the winner of the first Placido Domingo Operalia Competition in 1993. Graced with a flexible voice and extensive range, her career took off in duets with Domingo performed at the world's most distinguished halls. Creative expression runs in Mula's family, as her Albanian father is an accomplished opera singer and her mother a Russian-born artist. She was born in Tirana in 1963.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

¶11. (U) "We have constantly emphasized that prolongation of the process holds the real risk of losing trust in the process as a whole and would place the Kosovo political class and the future security of Kosovo and the region to a useless and risky test."

Foreign Minister Lulzim Basha

